



BACKGROUND

The underlying democracy and governance challenges in Cambodia are: weak government institutions; selective application of the rule of law; rampant corruption; suppression of competing political voices; self-censorship of media; and intimidation of civil society leaders. Local Government and Decentralization programs provide support for the USG's priority to improve the political rights and civil liberties of the Cambodian people, while laying the foundation for good governance at the sub-national level. USG programs reinforce the Royal Government of Cambodia's (RGC) ongoing decentralization reform process by building the capacity of elected Commune Councils (CCs) and promoting constructive partnership with citizens. Programs within the Elections and Political Processes element will support fair elections to ensure political rights are upheld during the July 2008 National elections in Cambodia.

PARTNERS

International Republic Institute (IRI) –\$5.6 million (September 2006 - September 2009). IRI works to: strengthen internal political party democracy through promoting internal elections and decentralized decision making processes; promote independent media through Voice of Democracy radio (VoD); and broaden youth participation in political life through the Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC).

National Democratic Institute (NDI) – \$4.2 million (September 2006 - September 2009). NDI works to: support women's leadership caucuses; promote the development of women's wings in all major political parties; strengthen the capacity of civil society; promote a free and fair electoral process; and promote constituency dialogues with members of parliament.

PACT Inc. – Local Administration and Reform Program (LAAR) \$14.4 million (October 2005 – September 2010). The program works to promote and enhance democratic local governance, with a main focus at the commune level. Critical themes of the program are: Increase citizen participation in decentralization and deconcentration reform; Strengthen Commune Council transparency, accountability and partnership; and Improve awareness of gender, youth and natural resource management issues within communes.

ILLUSTRATIVE RESULTS TO DATE

- IRI has assisted the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) to implement internal reforms that have established a membership list for the party; introduced internal party election procedures; trained and deployed trainers to deliver awareness campaign of the reforms; conducted a rolling internal election at the Village, Commune, District, Provincial and National level; and held a National Party Congress. IRI is currently working with the ruling party on internal reforms.
- IRI supported the Cambodian Center for Human Rights to conduct 154 public forums that reached over 100,000 citizens and stimulated public discussion on local human rights issues and matters affecting local communities.
- IRI has been working closely with YCC to teach 4,500 university students and 14,400 high school students about democratic concepts. With IRI support, YCC also hosted 108 radio call-in shows, 19 petition drives and 170 meetings with commune councils.
- NDI supported the 2007 communal election. It organized 31 candidate debates, with 102 candidates from nine political parties and 18,300 eligible voters (43% women) attended. NDI trained 130 candidates from 12 parties and 240 master trainers for party poll agents training and distributed 60,000 copies of election-day manual and observation checklist and supported election monitoring organizations in training 5500 both long and short-term observers.
- NDI program resulted in Parties placing 21,840 women candidates on the Candidate List, an increase of 77% from 2002 elections, and doubling the number of women placed within the top three positions on the list. In 2007, 15% of the elected Commune Councilors were women vs. 8% in 2002.
- NDI has conducted over 140 constituency dialogues in 8 provinces involving 60,000 citizens, most of which were recorded and broadcast on radio. Examples of actions taken following the dialogues are: the construction of dams, pathways, wells and canals; the reinstatement of compensation and back-pay for teachers in rural schools; a police crackdown on drug-trafficking and youth gangs; return of private property and land to people; and prohibition of illegal business practices.
- LAAR MoU signed with the Ministry of Interior, which issued a directive to all participating commune councils supporting LAAR objectives. The project is implemented in 8 provinces in consultation with the Ministry of Interior, provincial governors, and major decentralization and deconcentration donors. Partner provincial NGOs have been selected and field programs implemented in 230 communes to date.
- LAAR agreement with Ministry of Finance permitting supported commune councils to manage their own funds is building local capacity to address community needs and encouraging local government accountability.
- LAAR is building the capacity of women commune councilors in cooperation with the national Cambodian NGO Women for Prosperity, while the number of women commune councilors doubled following the 2007 commune council elections.

DEMOCRATIC LOCAL GOVERNANCE & DECENTRALIZATION